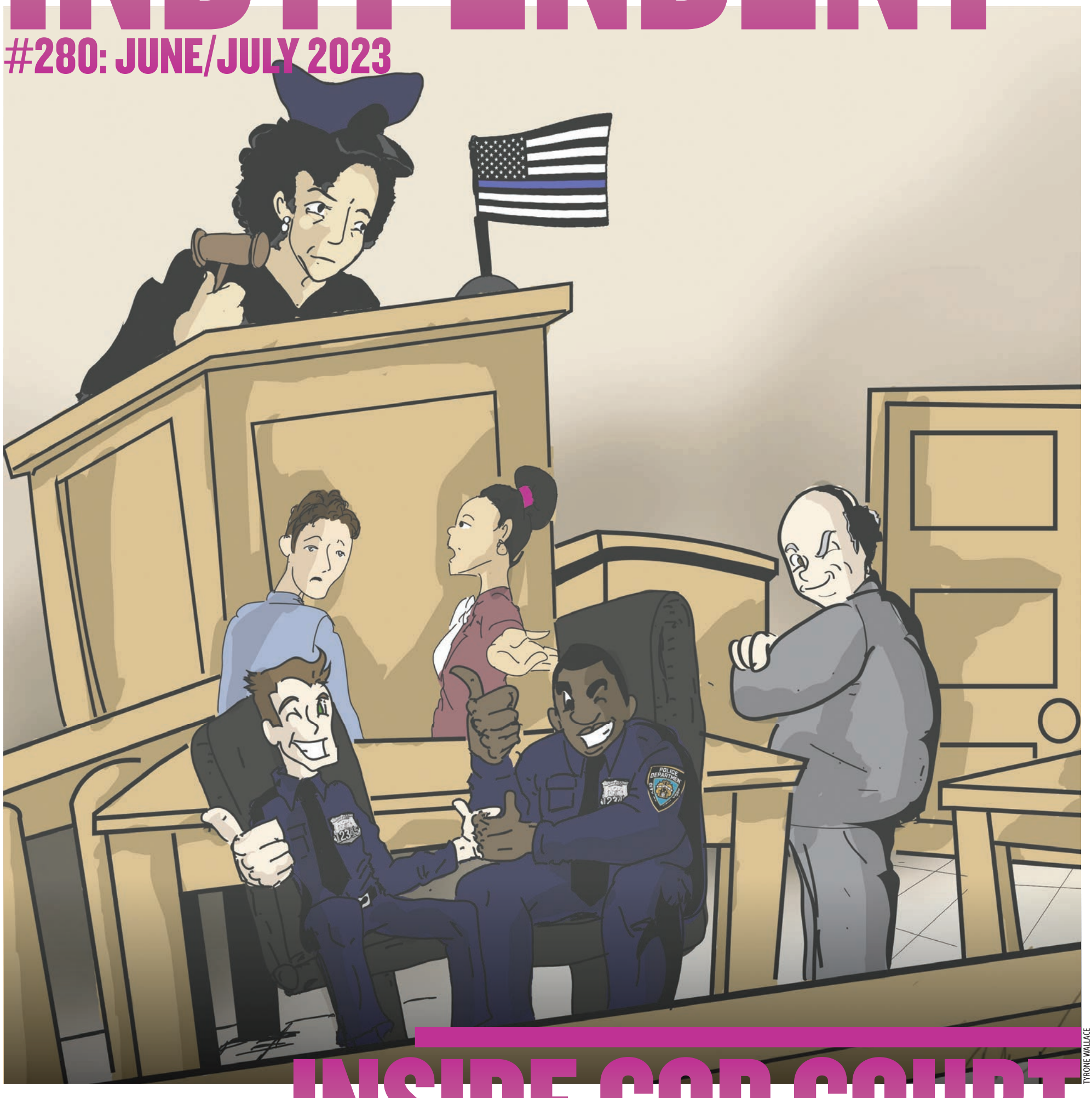
THE INDYPENDENT
#280: JUNE/JULY 2023

EXPANDED SUMMER EVENTS CALENDAR • PAGE 2–3



TYRONE WALLACE

INSIDE COP COURT

HOW THE NYPD'S INTERNAL TRIAL FOR TWO KILLER COPS BECAME A THEATER OF THE ABSURD

BY JOHN TEUFEL • PAGE 10

THE INDYPENDENT

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SUE BRISK

JUNE/JULY

JUNE 8–AUG 6
SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK: HAMLET
Returning once again to Free Shakespeare in the Park, director Kenny Leon commands The Delacorte stage with a nine-week, tour-de-force production of the Bard's masterpiece, Hamlet, a riveting, present-day take on Shakespeare's classic tale of family and betrayal, as enduring as the stars above Central Park. Go to publictheater.org/productions/season/2223/fsitp/hamlet/ or call (212) 539-8500 to reserve free tickets.
DELACORTE THEATRE
Central Park, Manhattan

THRU JULY 16 • WEEKDAYS 10AM–5PM; WEEKENDS UNTIL 9PM • FREE ENTRY WITH IDNYC OR $30
EXHIBITION: KARL LAGERFELD: A LINE OF BEAUTY
The Costume Institute's spring 2023 exhibition will examine the work of Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019). Focusing on the designer's stylistic vocabulary as expressed in aesthetic themes that appear time and again in his fashions from the 1950s to his final collection in 2019, the show will spotlight Lagerfeld's unique working methodology. Most of the approximately 150 pieces on display will be accompanied by Lagerfeld's sketches.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 5th Ave, Manhattan
(212) 535-7710

JUNE 16–18 • 9AM–6PM
14TH ANNUAL JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION: KALEIDOSCOPE OF BLACK CULTURE
The East New York and Brownsville communities have been a huge support in building the Juneteenth NY Festival into a community staple. Our Juneteenth Family Fun Day Festival on June 18 gathers 20,000+ mostly local attendees to enjoy a vibrant day of rich culture through music, dance, poetry, skits, history, vendors and family activities for single-family homes, married with children and extended family. Go to juneteenthny.com/ or call (646) 585-0456 for more.
LINDEN PARK on Sat June 17
PROSPECT PARK on Sun June 18
Brooklyn

SAT JUNE 17 • 12PM–7PM • FREE
LOWER EAST SIDE PRIDE BOOK CRAWL
Six independent bookstores (Bluestockings, Book Bar Club, Sweet Pickle Books, Yu and Me Books, and Printed Matter/St. Marks) on Manhattan's Lower East Side will celebrate the diversity and resilience of the neighborhood's indie bookshops by offering discounts, special giveaways and curated selections of queer books. Each bookstore will offer discounts and perks (such as free merchandise and free snacks) throughout the day. Visitors can go to the bookstores in any order between 12 p.m. and 7 p.m..; no reservations required.
VARIOUS LOCATIONS
For more go to bluestockings.com/events and scroll down until you see this event.

SAT JUNE 17 • 10AM ASSEMBLY; PARADE STARTS 1PM
41ST ANNUAL MERMAID PARADE
Founded in 1983, the Mermaid Parade pays tribute to a century of Coney Island ingenuity, revelry and pageantry by celebrating the artistic vision of the masses. With everything from a crowned King Neptune and Queen Mermaid, fantastical sea creatures and mer-folk, marching bands and dancing groups, to baby strollers and mechanized floats, it showcases the creativity of individuals from the five boroughs and beyond. Register to participate in the parade at coneyisland.com/mermaidparaderegistration.
Surf Ave & West 21st St, Brooklyn

TUE JUNE 20 • 8PM–10PM • FREE
SUMMERSTAGE: MET OPERA SUMMER RECITAL 2023
Listen to Metropolitan Opera stars performing an evening of arias and duets from some of opera's most beloved works. This is a once-a-year event and a lucky opportunity to experience opera's best. This year's concert features Gabriella Reyes, René Barbera, Juilliard alumnus Will Liverman and MET music staffer Dimitri Dover, an experienced soloist and collaborator who has performed in some of the country's most prestigious venues. Better to arrive early.

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STEVEN PISANO

SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, Central Park, Manhattan

SAT JUNE 24 • 5PM TAKE OFF
DYKE MARCH
The 2023 NYC Dyke March will be stepping off at Bryant Park at 5 p.m. and marching down 5th Ave. to Washington Square Park. Check @nycdykemarch on Instagram for updates.
Bryant Park, Brooklyn

JUNE 23–29 • VARIOUS SHOWTIMES • $15
DOCUMENTARY: DESPERATE SOULS, DARK CITY AND THE LEGEND OF MIDNIGHT COWBOY
A documentary that is as much about '60s counterculture as it is about the making of Schlesinger's brilliant Midnight Cowboy (1969). The mean streets of New York never looked sleazier or more sexually audacious. Schlesinger's foray into the world of lost souls remains equal parts funny and tragic. Its homoerotic subtext is both tender and surprising, especially for having been realized more than 50 years ago. With Bob Balaban, Brenda Vaccaro, Lucy Sante, Ian Buruma, Jennifer Salt and Brian De Palma.
FILM FORUM
209 West Houston St, Manhattan
(212) 727-8110

SUN JUNE 25 • 2PM • FREE
RECLAIM PRIDE: QUEER LIBERATION MARCH
The complex proliferation of parades as the model for Pride Celebrations internationally is deeply disturbing to many people in the LGBTQIA2S+ communities. In the city of New York, home to the Stonewall Inn, a group of Queer activists decided the parade in NYC had gone too far from the spirt of the Stonewall Rebellion, and miles away from achieving societal equity for queer and trans people. So was born the Reclaim Pride March. There will be a rally at 2 p.m.; the march will kick off at 3:30. Please wear a mask. Visit reclaimpridenyc.org for more info.
Foley Square, Manhattan

MON JUNE 26 • 8PM–10PM • FREE
FILM AT BRYANT PARK: MEAN GIRLS
Free movie nights return to city parks this summer with a stellar lineup of films, fun and food! The Bryant Park lawn opens at 5 p.m. Bring a blanket and a friend, and grab your spot on the lawn to watch the movie on the big screen under the city skyline. Mean Girls (2004) is an iconic teen comedy set in a suburban Chicago high school written by Tina Fey and starring Lindsay Lohan.
Bryant Park, Manhattan
(212) 768-4242

SAT JULY 8 • 7PM–10PM • DONATION
CONCERT: MUSIC FOR BAIL
Musical-abolitionist collective Sound Off: Music for Bail (musicforbail.com), in partnership with the Justice Committee, presents a show featuring four of the East Coast's finest string musicians in string works: Tanyaradzwa Tawengwa, Sebastien Zel, Florence Price, and Akua Dixon.
THE PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W 37th St, Manhattan
(347) 695-1095

ONGOING • FREE
STATEN ISLAND FERRY
Why pay for the Circle Line when you could see the Statue of Liberty for Free on the Staten Island Ferry? Make sure to go all the way up to the top level of the boat if you really want to feel the breeze in your hair. Once deboarded in Staten Island, you can go visit the beautiful rolling hills of North Shore Esplanade Park. Or, if you're feeling more adventurous, go inland and visit Silver Lake or one of the many enormous parks the island has to offer.
WHITEHALL TERMINAL
4 Whitehall St, Manhattan

SUNDAYS ~4:30PM–6PM • FREE
FREE MEALS: FOOD NOT BOMBS
Food Not Bombs is an autonomous non-hierarchical, volunteer-run organization with cells all over the world committed to rescuing food that would otherwise go to waste, creating new sustainable food sources and then distributing said food to hungry people in our communities. The Lower Manhattan chapter currently serves food every Sunday in Tompkins Square Park from around 4:30 to 6. You can go get food there, and if you're interested in helping out, they're always looking for new volunteers. Find them on Facebook: @lowermanhattanfoodnotbombs.
TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK
Southwest corner @ 7th Ave & Ave A, Manhattan

TUESDAYS • 6PM–9PM • FREE/DONATION
JAM: OPEN SOUL SESSION AT THE PEOPLE'S GARDEN
The Open Soul sessions welcome all musicians and neighbors to enjoy the spontaneous creativity that arises in this Bushwick community garden. Bring your instrument, voice, dance shoes, poetry, food, and drink and enjoy the jams! Visit @ thepeoplesgardenbk on Instagram for more.
THE PEOPLE'S GARDEN
Broadway & Green Ave, Brooklyn

THURSDAYS • 7PM–8PM • FREE
YOGA: BROOKLYN FLOW AT PROSPECT PARK
Brooklyn's finest yoga teachers from different studios around the park lead free, outdoor group yoga classes in a low-pressure, beautiful environment. Join hundreds of Brooklynites each week to celebrate yoga and wellness in our treasured Prospect Park. Bring your own mat or towel, a bottle of water and friends. Please RSVP and sign the waiver prior to your first class at brooklynflow.com/2023-rsvp.
LONG MEADOW
Prospect Park, Brooklyn

SEA YA THERE: *Celebrate Coney Island and the beginning of summer at this year's 41st annual Mermaid Parade.*

LEGACY: *New Yorkers will celebrate Juneteenth from June 16-18. The annual celebration of the abolition of slavery became a national holiday following the 2020 George Floyd uprising.*

IN THIS ISSUE

UNION RX, P4
Doctors at the Elmhurst Hospital hit the picket line.

TIPPING THE SCALES, P5
Supreme Court targets striking workers

LABOR BRIEFS, P5
Barnes & Noble goes union, Minnesota miracle and more.

MEDICAID UNWINDING , P6
Means testing health care for the poor is making a comeback.

PRIDE MONTH, P7
10 tips for well-meaning straight people.

NATIVE SON, P8
Yusef Salaam returns to Harlem to run for City Council.

FALSELY CONVICTED, P9
How the Central Park 5 became the Exonerated 5.

NYC BRIEFS, P9
NYC's worst landlord, CUNY controversy and a COVID comeback?

INSIDE COP COURT, P10
The NYPD sure has a funny idea of what justice looks like.

NYPD HISTORY LESSON, P13
A new report chronicles the NYPD's infamous history.

CONGRESS EXPOSED, P14
An interview with Jennifer Briney of the Congressional Dish podcast.

ART & PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY, P16
When remembering is resistance.

A WORLD TO GRAIN, P17
The hidden history of wheat.

MENTAL HEALTH, P18
A radical activist opens up about her depression and anxiety.

REVEREND BILLY, P19
Our advice columnist takes on wildfire smoke and AI.

Park marauders call it
'WILDING'
. . . and it's street slang for going berserk
7 teens held in rape-beating as victim clings to life
HE ESCAPED

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CIR/SEIU

DOCTORS ON STRIKE

UNION RX: *Medical residents at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens won an 18% pay raise over three years after going on strike in late May.*

By Steven Wishnia

Medical residents at the city-run Elmhurst Hospital in Queens won a significant raise with a three-day strike in late May, and now residents at Mount Sinai Health System's Morningside and West hospitals on the Upper West Side have warned they might walk out on similar issues.

The around 165 residents at Elmhurst, employed by Mount Sinai's Icahn School of Medicine, reached a tentative contract agreement that would give them an 18% raise over three years. That more or less brings them to parity with nonunion residents at Mount Sinai's flagship hospital on the Upper East Side, according to their union, the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) SEIU.

The strike was the first by residents in the city since 1990. Residents at Flushing and Jamaica hospitals in Queens, both managed by the nonprofit MediSys network, won new contracts in May just before their strike deadlines.

On June 2, the about 500 residents at Morningside and West hospitals gave management the 10-day advance notice legally required for health-care strikes, setting a deadline of 7 a.m. on June 13. They too are seeking parity with Mount Sinai's nonunion residents.

Doctors based at those two hospitals have a "second-class residency" when it comes to salary and benefits, says Dr. Brian Brown, an emergency-room resident at both Morningside and West. "For residents at the same employer to make thousands of dollars more for the same work in a different zip code across Central Park is not fair." He says he's often worked in the same unit as residents from Mount Sinai Hospital.

Mount Sinai management said in a statement June 5 that it had "offered CIR a salary package equal to those the union has accepted at other New York City hospitals" on May 31. "However, we are prepared for any potential staffing changes to ensure patients and families receive the highest quality care under all circumstances."

"We have not seen a lot of meaningful progress," Dr. Brown told *The Indypendent* June 2.

Residents are doctors doing postgraduate work after completing their one-year internship. The programs typically last for three years, and longer for specialties such as neurosurgery, says CIR communications director Sunyata Altenor. They do much of the work at hospitals, putting in 80 hours per week on average — down from 100 hours three or four decades ago, she adds — and are there before and after the attending physicians, and often do out-of-title work such as drawing blood.

Other issues for the Morningside and West residents include hazard pay, retroactive pay — their contract expired Nov. 30, in the midst of the Omicron variant of — COVID-19's surge — and fertility-preservation benefits. That's important, Brown explains, because doctors typically spend the prime of their reproductive years working 80 hours per week.

The New York strike authorizations are part of a recent wave of labor organizing by doctors. Around 8,000 residents and fellows have unionized since 2019, according to CIR, which now represents 27,000 resident physicians and fellows. And on June 8, residents at Massachusetts General hospital in Boston voted 1,215-412 to unionize.

Last month, doctors at Alameda Health System, a chain of hospitals and clinics in Oakland and the East Bay, reached what CIR calls "a groundbreaking tentative deal" after threatening an unfair-labor-practice strike. Last year, residents at Los Angeles County Hospital and Children's Hospital Oakland also authorized strikes, but reached contract agreements before the deadline.

One reason for increased organizing, Altenor says, is that three out of four U.S. doctors now work for corporations. "The more corporatized hospitals have become, the more doctors look to unions to get workplace rights," she continues. "After the strain of the pandemic, workers were recognizing how little agency they had."

"The newer generations of physicians are acutely aware of the nexus of money and power," Dr. Brown says. "We are cheap labor for the health-care system."

"Mount Sinai would be wise to note the current labor climate," he continues, noting recent strikes by nurses and screenwriters. "It's on them to avert the strike by coming back to the table with good-faith bargaining and real movement."

SUE BRISK

DAMAGE CONTROL

SUPREME COURT MAKES IT EASIER FOR COMPANIES TO SUE STRIKING WORKERS

ANTI-UNION: *A recent Supreme Court ruling opened the door to future attacks on striking workers.*

By Steven Wishnia

A Supreme Court decision June 1 has made it easier for employers to sue striking workers for alleged property damage.

The Court ruled 8-1 that when Teamster truck drivers at the Glacier Northwest concrete company in Seattle walked out in the middle of a shift in 2017 and left their trucks running, they failed to take "reasonable precautions" to avoid destroying the employer's property. Company staff had to dump several loads of concrete before it would harden inside the trucks.

On one level, the case was about drawing the line between "incidental" and intentional damage: Cheese spoiling during a strike has been deemed acceptable, but not leaving molten steel in a vat that can only be safely emptied by skilled workers. But the decision also weakens a 1959 precedent, *San Diego Building Trades Council v. Garmon*, that if workers have an "arguable" case their conduct was protected by federal labor law, the National Labor Relations Board has to rule on it before the employer can sue the union in state court, because the Board has "exclusive competence" in labor law.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett's majority opinion held that Glacier could sue Teamsters Local 174 because the drivers' abandoning the loaded trucks was not "arguably" protected. She dismissed the union's claims that it had scheduled the strike so it wouldn't happen on a day when a building's foundation was being poured, and that when union agents told the drivers to "leave the fuckers running," it was so the concrete wouldn't harden for several hours.

"Far from taking reasonable precautions to mitigate foreseeable danger to Glacier's property, the Union executed the strike in a manner designed to compromise the safety of Glacier's trucks and destroy its concrete," Barrett wrote.

"The political hacks at the Supreme Court have again voted in favor of corporations over working people," Teamsters General President Sean M. O'Brien responded in a statement, although, he added, "American workers must remember that their right to strike has not been taken away."

The decision was bad for unions, but not as bad as it could have been. Justice Clarence Thomas, in a concurring opinion joined by Neil Gorsuch, invited challenges to the *Garmon* decision, calling it an "oddity" that let the NLRB preempt state courts. Justice Samuel Alito said the strikers had obviously intentionally destroyed property. There was some speculation that justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor joining the majority was a compromise to prevent Thomas and Alito from shaping the decision.

The decision sends the case back to the Washington state courts.

"When the facts are revealed on remand, it will be clear the union acted properly and the truck drivers' strike was protected by federal law," AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said in a statement. "Unfortunately, the court then relied on unfounded allegations in the employer's complaint that the union intended to damage the cement trucks when it called the strike."

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, dissenting, said the majority had based its judgment entirely on the employer's allegations while ignoring NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo's accusation that Glacier interfered with protected strike conduct when it disciplined the drivers.

That, she said, should have settled the issue about whether the drivers' conduct was arguably protected. The Court's majority, she said, had failed "to heed Congress's intent with respect to the Board's primary role in adjudicating labor disputes."

ELSIE CARSON-HOLT

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

ON THE BOOKS: *On June 7, workers at the Union Square Barnes & Noble voted 76-2 to form a union.*

WORKERS MOVE TO UNIONIZE AT BARNES & NOBLE & BROOKLYN PIZZERIA

Some 100 workers at Barnes & Noble's Union Square bookstore, the chain's flagship location, voted 76-2 on June 7 to unionize with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, while workers at the Park Slope store filed a petition for a vote May 25. "We don't have a voice, and even if we go to our management, they don't have the jurisdiction to give us anything that we ask for — it always has to come from corporate," Union Square bookseller Zephyr Caulfield, who makes minimum wage, told *Gothamist*. Workers at the Rutgers University Barnes & Noble in New Jersey voted to join RWDSU on May 12, and those at Strand Book Store near Union Square have been part of United Auto Workers Local 2179 since the 1970s. Meanwhile, the around 40 workers at Barboncino Pizza in Crown Heights will vote in July on whether to join Workers United. The union hopes to replicate its success organizing Starbucks workers — and make Barboncino the first unionized stand-alone pizzeria in the city.

MUNICIPAL RETIREES SUE ADAMS ADMINISTRATION

The New York City Organization of Public Service filed a class-action lawsuit May 31 trying to block the city from switching their health coverage from Medicare to a private Medicare Advantage plan. The suit argues that the City must honor its promise to cover health-care costs for retired and disabled employees through the Medicare system, and that the Medicare Advantage plan, run by Aetna, won't be accepted by many medical providers and will expose retirees to crippling health-care costs. "You will get hit with prior authorizations, with copayments — they will nickel-and-dime you to death," plaintiff Nancy Losinno told *Work-Bites* at a City Hall protest. Mayor Eric Adams and the main municipal workers' unions have backed privatization, saying it will save money. The roughly 250,000 retirees have until June 30 to opt out and choose to pay for Medicare coverage themselves. If they don't, they'll be automatically enrolled in Medicare Advantage Sept. 1.

MINNESOTA ENACTS LABOR PROTECTIONS; TEXAS KILLS THEM

On May 24 Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz on signed a sweeping labor bill that will enable almost all workers in the state to earn up to six paid sick days a year, set minimum wages at nursing homes, ban non-compete agreements and anti-union "captive audience" meetings, require ergonomics-safety programs at warehouses and meatpacking plants, and make construction contractors pay workers wages stolen by their subcontractors. However, Walz vetoed a bill to set a minimum wage for ride-share drivers after Uber threatened to end almost all service in Minnesota. The veto showed "the power corporations hold on our government," state Sen. Omar Fateh (D-Minneapolis) said. Meanwhile, the Texas Legislature passed a bill dubbed the "Death Star" by labor unions. It will prohibit local governments from enacting regulations not "explicitly authorized" by state law, such as eviction protections or Dallas and Austin's laws that construction workers must get 10-minute water breaks.

BIG UNION VICTORY IN THE SOUTH

In the labor movement's biggest win in the South in years, 1,400 workers at the Blue Bird school-bus company in Georgia voted to join United Steelworkers Local 679. The vote, announced May 12, was 697–435. "It's been a long time since a manufacturing site with 1,400 people has been organized, let alone organized in the South," Steelworkers Organizing Director Maria Somma told *Labor Notes*. Workers at Blue Bird, the nation's second-largest school-bus manufacturer, began organizing in 2020, sparked by unsafe conditions during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The company has prospered recently, receiving federal grants to build electric buses as school districts convert their fleets to cleaner vehicles. But it mounted an aggressive union-busting campaign, including threatening to close down, despite requirements that it had to remain neutral to receive federal aid. Workers at the two factories and one warehouse, who now make $13–$25 an hour, said they needed better and more consistent pay.

AMBA GUERGUERIAN

MEDICAID'S GREAT UNWINDING

DON'T LET NEW PAPERWORK HURDLES TRIP YOU UP

By Amba Guerguerian

During the pandemic, the number of New York State residents enrolled in Medicaid rose from 6.1 million to 7.8 million. This was due to a 2020 federal law that suspended annual paperwork requirements that often discourage low-income Americans from applying for the federally-funded program.

The belief that someone somewhere is receiving a government benefit they are not entitled to is a hallmark of America's stingy social safety net. Means testing is the instrument for enforcing this ideology of scarcity. And it is returning with a vengeance for the vast majority of the 92.3 million Medicaid users in the United States who will have to "recertify" for public health care in order to avoid losing their coverage.

This "unwinding," as it is called, began on April 1. In Republican-led states such as Florida and South Dakota, hundreds of thousands of residents were swiftly removed from their Medicaid rolls. New York is taking a more gradual approach, but State health officials say the number of Medicaid recipients could drop by 1.3 million over the next year. Many of those New Yorkers are expected to find other kinds of coverage, though they could face higher costs at a time when inflation is already running high. Meanwhile, 100,00-200,000 people in the state could become fully uninsured, including some who would qualify for Medicaid coverage but will fail to submit the proper paperwork.

HOW IT WENT DOWN

As a part of the expanded social-safety net spurred by the onset of COVID-19, Congress required state Medicaid and Children Health Insurance (CHIP) programs to keep people continuously enrolled throughout the pandemic in exchange for federal funding. In December 2022, Congress passed a law ending continuous enrollment on March 31 of this year. The bipartisan deal gives states 12 months to initiate renewals for government-subsidized health care and 14 months total to complete them.

Who receives Medicaid? Children, pregnant people, low-income adults, elders and people with disabilities.

The uninsured rate nationwide has dropped by 18% since 2019, according to the CDC. But, as the recertification process begins, millions are at risk of losing coverage, reducing recent gains.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 6.2 million people will likely be left without any insurance after unwinding. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that upwards of 15 million people nationwide could lose Medicaid coverage specifically, "including 7 million who actually remain eligible for the program but fail to jump through the bureaucratic hoops!" Adam Gaffney, an ICU doctor at the Cambridge Health Alliance, told *Common Dreams*.

Some states, like New York, have launched public outreach campaigns to ensure Medicaid recipients understand how to recertify. California and Rhode Island are even planning to auto-enroll Medicaid recipients into state-based marketplaces.

Health care isn't the only part of the social-safety net shrinking. Since March 1, certain SNAP benefits were cut in over 30 states, including New York. The end of pandemic emergency allotments is leading to a reduction of at least $95 per month in SNAP. Some U.S. households are experiencing cuts from $250 to $30 a month. Additionally, the boosted Child Tax Credit (CTC) expired after one year in late 2021, resulting in a 41% surge in child poverty.

IN NEW YORK

More than 9 million New Yorkers — the nearly 8 million covered by Medicaid/CHIP and an additional million on the Essential Plan — will need to recertify to see whether they still qualify for government-sponsored insurance. New York City will be disproportionately affected, with 56% of the state's Medicaid/CHIP users residing here.

The State has taken some steps to protect the most vulnerable Medicaid users from losing coverage, such as automatically renewing coverage for people over 65 and those with disabilities.

Recertifications will be sent in batches over the course of 12 months. Automatic renewal will continue for New Yorkers until July 1, but if your health insurance expires any time after that, you will need to recertify for this year before then in order to avoid any gaps in coverage.

The State will contact you via the communication method you've indicated on your State of Health account — electronically or by mail. You should call the New York State of Health (NYSOH) at (855) 355-5777 or go into your account to ensure that your contact information and communication method are updated and to check when you need to recertify.

And, some New Yorkers were already sent recertification notices, so you should call the NYSOH if you think you may not have been receiving mail, texts or emails from the State due to negligence or incorrect contact information. You can also sign up for text messaging with NYSOH to get reminders of important deadlines and updates regarding your health plan by texting "START" to (866) 988-0327.

The recertification requirement applies to those covered by Medicaid through New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA), which sent out letters to its clients at the onset of Medicaid unwinding. People enrolled in the State's emergency Medicaid program for undocumented people will also have to recertify.

The State has increased Medicaid income-eligibility levels for children, the elderly and those with disabilities. The maximum income for a single person is now $1,677 per month.

If you no longer qualify for Medicaid but aren't insured through your job and haven't received a large increase in income, you likely will still qualify for government-subsidized health insurance. New York's Essential Plan for low-income individuals will be available to some, and new federal tax-credit guidelines will make coverage more affordable for individuals transitioning to commercial plans available through the NYSOH marketplace.

The State says it will increase its customer-service-center staffing to above pre-pandemic levels to handle the anticipated call volume. Despite these efforts, more than one million New Yorkers could be dropped from public insurance due to unwinding, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. While the majority of New Yorkers will likely be assigned to other plans, the organization projects that the state's uninsured numbers could rise 20%.

More than half of 415 New York respondents to a poll conducted by Make the Road said they were unaware they would have to get their coverage renewed once the federal

Continued on page 19

STREET-LEVEL OUTREACH: *Maria Lazardo (left), executive director of NMIC, and a co-worker staff an information table at a June 3 neighborhood street fair in Washington Heights. Many New Yorkers don't realize they are at risk of losing their Medicaid coverage.*

ASH MARINACCIO

ADVICE FOR ALLIES

10 TIPS FOR WELL-MEANING STRAIGHT PEOPLE

By Jessica Max Stein

PROGRESS PRIDE FLAG:
Was developed in 2018 to celebrate the diversity of the LGBTQ community.

We in the LGBTQ+ community are so grateful for your solidarity this Pride month, especially in the midst of these harrowing culture wars. Here are 10 ways to be an even better ally!

1 Practice saying "LGBTQ+" so it rolls off the tongue as easily as your own name. So many straight people stumble through the acronym like it's an alien tongue from the far-off Planet Gaydor! Say it like you mean it! Say it like you're picturing actual people behind each letter!

2 Learn our history. Remember that Stonewall was a RIOT! While Pride is indeed an opportunity to revel in our fabulousness, it's mainly a commemoration of all the hard work we have done to resist our oppression. Remember that! Appreciate it!

3 If you go to a Pride event, actually talk to LGBTQ+ people! We're the reason that you're there! Don't just gawk at us like exotic zoo animals! Thank us for our service!

4 Stop misgendering people all the time! And if you do, apologize! If you don't know someone's pronouns, just ask! And if you don't like someone's pronouns, don't argue!

5 In fact, stop gendering people all the time! I don't care if you are from California, "dude" is not gender-neutral! Neither is "you guys"! Practice using gender-neutral terms like "friends," "folks" or that Southern charmer, "y'all." It's really not that hard!

6 Think gender euphoria, not gender dysphoria! Understand that many trans and gender-nonconforming people adore and revel in their bodies just as they are! The problem isn't our bodies, it's your binary thinking!

7 If someone tells you their name, accept it! Don't ask if it's "short for something"! Don't ask if it's "on their birth certificate!" Just say, "Nice to meet you, _____!"

8 Remember that our LGBTQ+ identities are not just about sex! They're about community, unity and solidarity! When we tell you we're queer, we're not telling you who we have sex with, we're telling you we've got each others' backs!

9 Paradoxically, at the same time, honor that a big part of LGBTQ+ identity is sex! Stop sanitizing us! To invoke Emma Goldman: If I can't fuck, it's not my revolution!

10 Finally, don't expect us to thank you for your allyship! Some of us have been doing this work for decades — we are tired! Patting you on the back takes energy we don't have! Don't expect us to go to your Pride event, especially if we had no say in organizing it! What's more, learn the difference between impact and intent! You might mean well, but we might still be angry! That's okay! Do the work not for our gratitude, but because you think it's the right thing to do!

See you at Pride!

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

I JUST WANT TO TELL SOMEBODY
Written & Performed by
Ronald "Smokey" Stevens
Directed by Stephen Byrd
Playing NOW, through June 18th
Tickets $18/tdf available

FREEDOM SUMMER
Written by Toby Armour
Directed by Joan Kane
Playing NOW through June 25th
Tickets $18/tdf available

A Stitch In Time
Book & Lyrics by Claude Solnik
Music by Gary Edwards
Directed by Robert Leibowitz
Playing June 22-July 9
Tickets $18/tdf available

TNC's Summer Street Theater Program
in its Annual Summer Tour
"LIFE ON THE THIRD RAIL
or, A SUBWAY DELAY TO THE FUTURE
Book & Lyrics by Crystal Field
Music Composed by Joseph Vernon Banks
Opens August 5th
FREE!!! FREE!!! FREE!!!

NOT ON OUR DIME
END NY FUNDING OF ISRAELI SETTLER VIOLENCE

The Israeli settler movement expelling Palestinians from their generational homes is subsidized by New York State. We can end this.

Over 700,000 Israeli settlers live on 250 illegal settlements built on Palestinian land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. To establish these settlements, the Israeli settler movement and its institutions have used a combination of discriminatory laws, Israeli military decrees, surveillance, and outright violence, often by private individuals with the backing of the Israeli military. Many of the settlers who gut these towns are actually funded by organizations here in New York State.

TAKE ACTION: Write to your New York state representatives now and ask them to co-sponsor the Not On Our Dime!: Ending NY Funding of Israeli Settler Violence Act:
notonourdime.com/takeaction

BROOKLYN FOR PEACE

NINA BERMAN

JOHN TARLETON

COURTESY

HARLEM POWER STRUGGLE

EXONERATED 5 MEMBER YUSEF SALAAM AND A PAIR OF VETERAN POLS VIE FOR OPEN CITY COUNCIL SEAT

By Theodore Hamm

If Rip Van Winkle fell asleep in the 1980s and woke up in June 2023, the price of rent in Central Harlem would shock him. Although the area's median income is only $48,000, the median one-bedroom apartment currently goes for $2,650 per month.

The current race for City Council pits two veterans of the Harlem old guard running away from their Albany positions versus a high-profile newcomer backed by Manhattan's longtime Democratic Party boss. Call it Uptown Shakespeare.

Harlem's political elite clearly did not like City Councilwoman Kristin Richardson Jordan, the next-gen socialist who announced in mid-May that she would not run for reelection in Council District 9, although her name will remain on the June 27 primary ballot. Unlike the older leadership, Richardson Jordan was passionate in her commitment to addressing the affordability crisis faced by longtime Harlemites.

Assemblymember (and former City Councilmember) Inez Dickens, who turns 74 in July, is a protégé of former Congressman Charles Rangel. The same goes for party boss Keith Wright, but he and Dickens are not allies. Congressman Adriano Espaillat, who defeated Wright for Rangel's seat, is backing Dickens even though he was a Rangel foe.

Al Taylor, who will be 66 in August, is an Assemblyman from Upper Manhattan and similarly no fan of the party leader.

The newcomer, of course, is Exonerated 5 member Yusef Salaam, whom Wright recruited to run. Salaam, 49, is easily the most progressive candidate in the race.

Like Mayor Adams, Dickens has strong ties to COBA, the Rikers corrections officers' union that has endorsed and donated money to her campaign. Dickens recently told the Jim Owles Democratic Club that rather than close Rikers, "it might make more sense to rehabilitate the existing facilities" there. That is music to the ears of COBA.

Because he was only 15 at the time of his arrest for the Central Park jogger assault, Salaam did not go to Rikers. But he most certainly knows the scars caused by incarceration. Salaam supports the plan to close Rikers by 2027 and is critical of the Adams administration's failure to move "quickly enough" to meet that timetable.

Open New York, the YIMBY group founded by real estate investors, backs Salaam. On the trail, Salaam has called attention to the affordability crisis, but his platform lacks specifics. Dickens, meanwhile, makes dubious claims regarding the success of her "negotiating skills" in addressing Harlem's housing needs. A decade ago, then-Public Advocate Bill de Blasio placed Dickens on his "Worst Landlords' Watch-List" because of violations at the Lenox Avenue apartment building her family owned.

While in the Assembly, Al Taylor's position on abortion has come under fire. In 2019, he voted against the Reproductive Health Act, which strengthened abortion rights in New York. The church where he is a pastor also refused to perform same-sex marriages. Such positions may play well with some older Black voters. But there is also a growing number of liberal white voters in the district, which extends from Central Park through Sugar Hill.

Taylor tells The Indypendent that he is the most "passionate" candidate in the race. "I am a lifelong Harlemite, and I have seen the struggles and triumphs of our people up close — as a troubled teen under arrest, a veteran looking for my next job, a minister and a public servant." Whether that message will resonate with younger voters or newcomers is unclear.

Heading into the homestretch, Dickens and Taylor are on solid financial footing. The city's 8-1 matching funds mean that each candidate will have at least $125,000 on hand. Salaam's boost from those funds will bring him to roughly $30,000 but his campaign assures The Indy that "he will have more than enough to win."

Unlike most first-time City Council candidates, Salaam has significant name recognition. Richardson Jordan's exit from the race opened up the progressive lane. Barring an unexpected alliance between Dickens and Taylor, ranked-choice voting most likely will benefit Salaam.

The key, as always, is turnout. Although Harlem is one of the more politically-active parts of the city, there is no citywide race that will generate voter enthusiasm. The prevailing sense among campaign insid-

ers is that low turnout (e.g. less than 10,000) benefits Dickens, who can rely on her base of older people to cast ballots. But if turnout exceeds 10,000, Salaam stands a good chance.

A Salaam victory, of course, would be a big win for Keith Wright. The degree to which the novice politician would then answer to the party boss is an open question. Only the Bard knows what will happen in the next act.

NATIVE SON: *Yusef Salaam returned to Harlem to run for City Council.*

MACHINE MADE: *A poster for City Council candidate Inez Dickens.*

THIRD CANDIDATE: *Assemblyman Al Taylor is also running.*

NYC VOTES

ALL 51 CITY COUNCIL SEATS ARE UP FOR RE-ELECTION THIS YEAR.
PRIMARY DAY: TUESDAY JUNE 27
EARLY VOTING: SATURDAY JUNE 17-SUNDAY JUNE 25.
FOR MORE, SEE NYCVOTES.ORG

COURTESY NYPL

WHO ARE THE EXONERATED 5?

APRIL–NOVEMBER 1989
Trisha Meili, a 28-year-old white investment banker, is victim of brutal sexual assault in Central Park. NYPD detectives coerce five mid-teenagers–four Black, one Latino–into making false confessions regarding the rape. Donald Trump and Mayor Ed Koch call for reinstatement of the death penalty in New York. Divided racial reaction to the case helps build support for David Dinkins, who topples Koch in Democratic primary and defeats Rudy Giuliani in the general election.

AUGUST–DECEMBER 1990
Manhattan prosecutor Linda Fairstein places defendants Antron McCray, Raymond Santana, and Yusef Salaam on trial together. After 10 days of deliberations, the jury finds all three guilty of 1st-degree rape, despite the lack of physical evidence. In December, Fairstein wins similar convictions of Kevin Richardson; co-defendant Korey Wise is acquitted of rape but found guilty of 1st-degree assault. Each of the Central Park 5 defendants receives a minimum of five years in prison.

1990s
McCray, Salaam, Wise and Richardson unsuccessfully appeal their convictions. All five except Wise are paroled between 1995-1997. Wise remains incarcerated.

2001-2002
While at Auburn Prison, Wise meets Matias Reyes, who had pleaded guilty to four rapes that occurred in the four months after the attack on Meili. Reyes confesses to the Meili assault, stating that he acted alone. His DNA then matches that of the semen found on Meili. Neither Wise nor the four other defendants had any connection to Reyes. In late 2002, Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau moves to vacate the five convictions.

BAD NEWS: The Central Park 5 were treated as guilty by the NYC media from the moment they were detained by the NYPD.

2003-2014
The Bloomberg administration and the City Law Department fight the lawsuit seeking civil compensation for the now-Exonerated Five. In 2013, Bill de Blasio makes a campaign pledge to settle the lawsuit. In mid-2014, the de Blasio administration's Law Department reaches a $40-million settlement with the Five.

2016-2020
As candidate and president, Trump restates belief in the guilt of the Exonerated Five.

2021-2022
As candidate, Manhattan D.A. Alvin Bragg vows to reexamine all of Linda Fairstein's cases. In July 2022, Bragg's office exonerates Steven Lopez, who was arrested with the Five and pleaded guilty to an unrelated assault.

2023
Yusef Salaam runs for City Council.

– THEODORE HAMM

LAURA JANE BRETT

LANDLORD FAIL: *Tenant groups rallied on June 3 at 410-12 W. 46th St. in Manhattan to demand the city confiscate the poorly maintained buildings from super-slumlord Daniel Ohebshalom.*

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

'WORST LANDLORD' TENANTS SEEK CITY TAKEOVER

Tenants in two Hell's Kitchen buildings owned by Daniel Ohebshalom, named the city's worst landlord by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams last December, are trying to get the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to take over running them. Residents at 410-412 West 46th St., 65-year-old John Reeds told a rally June 3, have had to live with "rats leaping at us," a suspicious fire in the basement in April, drug addicts and prostitutes using warehoused vacant apartments, and a flood the landlord's tenant-relations manager called "a minor leak." The building at 412 was ordered vacated by the city after a 2015 fire destroyed part of the roof. HPD concluded hearings June 2 on whether it should appoint an independent administrator to manage the buildings under its 7A program. "Why is this landlord still operating these buildings after all these years?" Housing Conservation Coordinators tenant organizer Mark Natanawan asked.

IS COVID RETURNING TO NYC?

COVID may be rebounding in New York City, according to analysis of wastewater from city treatment plants. Samples taken from the city's 14 wastewater treatment plants on May 21 showed "high" concentrations of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, according to the NYS Wastewater Surveillance Network's dashboard. The virus was found in more than 75% of samples taken at 10 of the 14 plants, including the two that serve the most people, Wards Island and Brooklyn's Newtown Creek. While wastewater data is not very specific geographically, it's now a significant indicator because COVID testing has fallen by more than half since the federal government declared the public-health emergency over in early May. The number of reported cases now might be "a very small fraction" of actual cases, CUNY School of Public Health professor Dr. Bruce Y. Lee told Gothamist. "High" concentrations in wastewater generally signify at least 50 COVID cases per 100,000 people.

CUNY COMMENCEMENT CONTROVERSY

On June 5, students, workers and other allies disrupted a CUNY Board of Trustees meeting, chanting, "We stand with Fatima; Shame on the Board of Trustees!"

On May 12, Fatima Mohammed called out Israel's human-rights violations against Palestinians during her commencement speech at CUNY Law, which she was elected by the class of 2023 to give.

On May 30, the university released a statement condemning her address, categorizing it as hate speech. The next day, Mayor Adams denounced Mohammed at a Jewish American Heritage Month celebration he hosted.

Mohammed's speech has drawn the ire of Congress, including Reps. Ritchie Torres, a Democrat from the Bronx; and Mike Lawler, a Republican from Upstate New York who vowed to craft legislation to strip all federal funding for CUNY.

Grassroots Palestinian group Within Our Lifetime (WOL) has been central in organizing support for Mohammed, launching a "We stand with Fatima" campaign. WOL and other groups successfully pressured CUNY to uncensor Mohammed's speech — the university had unpublished the entire 2023 commencement video.

CITY COUNCIL'S LGBTQ CAUCUS PROPOSES 'MARSHA AND SYLVIA PLAN'

The City Council's LGBTQIA+ Caucus is developing a package of bills, funding, and resolutions intended to address "systemic issues" facing the city's more than 700,000 LGBTQIA+ people. "There is no coordinated municipal policy agenda for LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers," caucus cochairs Tiffany Cabán (D-Queens) and Crystal Hudson (D-Brooklyn) said in a statement. Dubbed the "Marsha and Sylvia Plan" after pioneering trans activists Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, its agenda covers nine areas, among them arts and culture, education, and youth and foster care. Proposals include creating a city Office of LGBTQIA+ Affairs; at least $550,000 to fund nonprofits serving LGBTQIA+ immigrants and $10 million for nonprofits that specialize in housing LGBTQIA+ youth, who are estimated to make up 40% of the city's homeless youth; expanding outreach and distribution for HIV-prevention medications; providing more housing for LGBTQIA+ older adults; protecting trans and nonbinary prisoners from sexual assault; and decriminalizing sex work.

INSIDE COP COURT

HOW THE NYPD'S INTERNAL TRIAL OF TWO OFFICERS FOR THE KILLING OF A MAN IN HIS OWN KITCHEN DEVOLVED INTO A THEATER OF THE ABSURD

TYRONE WALLACE

By John Teufel

If you're searching for grandeur, you'll do well to skip over the fourth-floor administrative trial room at One Police Plaza in downtown Manhattan. The ornate, imposing courtrooms at the civil courthouse down the street at 60 Centre — where Law & Order regularly films — feel a world away from this dingy, threadbare simulacrum. Fluorescent lights overhead lend a nauseating pall to proceedings. There is one thin line of windows in the room, and it is blocked by what appears to be scaffolding, so even on the sunniest days, it perpetually feels like dusk. Fake wood and false surfaces abound, from the cheap plastic composites of the floor to the thin wood-paneling of the walls, as though someone knew that mahoganies and cherries best convey the seriousness of legal proceedings, but was only given a WalMart budget.

The surroundings are well-matched, though, to what happens in this room, where issues of tremendously low stakes — indeed, arguably, issues without any stakes at all — are hashed out in a grand pantomime of legal process, stripped of any of the, well, law usually found in such a process. From the actors to the stage on which they stand, there are only illusions here. The wood paneling conceals a void.

I was here to observe the disciplinary trial of Herbert Davis and Brendan Thompson, both NYPD officers, for the killing of a gay Black man named Kawaski Trawick on April 14, 2019, in the Bronx. Around me were journalists, activists, Trawick's family and many, many armed cops, whose 9mm pistols bounced against their waists as they barked orders at us.

The defendants, Davis and Thompson, were armed, too, and in full uniform. For much of the trial, Thompson wore a comically over-the-top military Kevlar vest. All attendees went through metal detectors, so I can't imagine the purpose of this other than to remind the "judge" — as if she needed reminding — that he is a member of a very exclusive club, the club of people who can kill other people without consequence.

So there I sat alongside the ruffled *Daily News* reporter, the surprisingly young *Post* guy, a few Zoomer activists and everyone else, as we waited to see what further violence the City of New York would inflict on Kawaski Trawick and his family.

COOKING WHILE BLACK

There is video of Trawick's death, and it is all the evidence you need to understand, at least on a moral level, how unnecessary and brutal his death was. What follows is a description of the events seen in the video, along with some context learned after the events occurred.

Trawick locked himself out of his apartment while cooking, while holding a stick and a bread knife, the latter of which he relegated to his pocket once in the hall. Undoubtedly frustrated, probably at both the situation and himself (and he seems super annoyed in the video), he left his hall to speak with his superintendent and a building security guard. Neither would let him back in, for reasons that aren't clear, and so he then called the Fire Department, who broke his door so he could re-enter his own home. In that call, Trawick very clearly states he has locked himself out of his apartment, and further notes that the super "is busy." In a clear effort to smear Trawick, the defense made much of Trawick falsely telling the Fire Department on this call that there was a fire in his apartment. I won't defend Trawick's choice there, except to say that is entirely, 100% irrelevant to everything that happened next, and was not known to Davis or Thompson.

At some point, the security guard called 911, reporting that Trawick was banging on his neighbors' and the super's doors, and was holding a stick. No knife is mentioned. In the 911 dispatch to Thompson and Davis, this becomes a report that Trawick was "harassing" the security guard. The 911 reporter also told the officers that the building was a "sensitive location" for "EDP" – emotionally disturbed persons. (At trial, we learned this meant that the building was known to have at least a few EDPs residing therein.) The super also called 911, claiming Trawick threatened to punch him and emphasizing that tenants are not supposed to knock on his door, ever, for any reason.

Davis and Thompson reported to the scene, first waiting in their car for quite some time as firetrucks cleared out, and then walking past firefighters leaving Trawick's unit. Both officers failed to ask FDNY why they were in the building. (This continues to confuse me — you are literally walking past firefighters on your way to respond to a 911 call and don't ask what they are doing there?) After knocking on the door to Trawick's apartment, and getting no response, Davis pushed the door open, unlatching the security chain as he did so. There the officers found Trawick, in his kitchen, listening to music.

You should understand something at this point. Davis is a Black man, with 16 years of experience as a police officer. Thompson is white, and at the time had three years on the force. Police violence can't be reduced entirely to racial dynamics, but as you'll see, it's hard to dispute that race had a lot to do with what happened next.

Davis immediately pulls out his baton, and Thompson, his taser. "What are you doing in my home?" asks Trawick when he sees the intruders. Davis raps the door hard with his baton (at trial, he admitted this was done to intimidate Trawick) and says firmly to his partner, "We ain't gonna tase him." Trawick walks to the back of his kitchen to turn down his music, so as to better converse with the officers. Again and again, Trawick asks why the officers are in his home. Thompson says, "He's got a knife," to which Trawick responds, "I got a knife because I'm cooking." The officers tell Trawick to drop the knife, and Trawick continues to ask why they are in his home and why they kicked in his door. He tells the officers he was locked out of his apartment, but the FDNY let him back in. He is, the video shows, confused and frightened. As he scratches his nose and mumbles to himself, Thompson lets loose with the taser. It is a jump-scare moment — there is no indication why Thompson chose to tase Trawick while Trawick was standing still, in his kitchen, knife pointed away from the officers. I'd also submit it was the moment that sealed Trawick's ultimate fate.

Trawick collapses to the floor, the voltage rapidly spreading through his nerve endings. (I was mildly tased once, by holding a taser prong in my hand, and it feels like your bones are going to jump out of your skin.) The officers rush into the apartment, and Trawick jolts back to his feet, screaming, telling the officers to get out. He runs to the back of his apartment, away from the officers. As Thompson pulls his gun, Davis keeps cool and tells Thompson, "No, no, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't." Davis goes so far as to hold his hand in front of Thompson's gun. The officers, at this point, are in the doorframe of Trawick's apartment — the door is, and has been, theirs to close whenever they choose. Trawick, still hysterical, runs into his kitchen, in the direction of the officers, and Thompson unloads — bang bang bang, a pause, and a final bang.

Only then do the officers fully retreat to the hallway and close the door to Trawick's apartment. Davis peeks his head back into the apartment, and the video ends. We now know that neither officer ever attempted to render medical aid to Trawick (they are being charged with misconduct for this, too), who died on his kitchen floor, one of Thompson's bullets having torn through his heart.

The video released to the public by Bronx DA Darcel Clark does not include this next part. Upon arriving at the scene, a sergeant asked Davis and Thompson who was injured. Like automatons, both officers responded at once, "Nobody. Just a perp."

And that superintendent? Upon learning Trawick had been killed, he asked an officer: "Why did you have to shoot that man? Y'all gonna shoot me too?"

ACTORS

Proceedings in the Thompson/Davis "trial" were overseen by a woman named Rosemary Maldonado, who is not a judge, although she is frequently referred to as such, and certainly plays the part. Maldonado is the sort of bureaucratic functionary Kafka enjoyed, bouncing around from agency to agency, rising with the tide and taking lunch at 1 p.m. In 2014, then-Police Commissioner Bill Bratton appointed her the NYPD's Deputy Commissioner of Trials, where she is tasked with overseeing proceedings to determine whether officers should be disciplined.

Except that is not really what she does. Ultimately, all disciplinary decisions are the purview of one person — the police commissioner, currently Keechant Sewell. Whatever Maldonado decides is a stitch in time, a whisp of smoke. When Maldonado walks in the room, we are told to rise from our seats before she tells us to be seated again, which we all do. It is never clear why we perform this exercise for her and not, say, the DMV clerk renewing our license.

Probably the DMV clerk has a better case, as they are bound to follow clearly established law about licenses and so forth. Maldonado, not so much. In a court case, be it criminal or civil, there is a thick book of statutes telling everyone what they can and cannot do to prove or defend their case. It is often disregarded by the judge, but there are rails guiding the process, rules of evidence, pathways to review. Here, in this administrative proceeding, there is nothing of the sort.

These contradictions and vagaries led to the first blowup of the trial as Maldonado announced she would not be considering illegal entry charges against Davis and Thompson because the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which investigates police misconduct, had blown the statute of limitations to bring them. But as the CCRB lawyers pointed out, the statute had been blown because the NYPD refused to provide body camera footage of the officers for 19 months — and indeed, didn't provide it until after Clark announced there would be no criminal charges.

CCRB's prosecution squad consisted of two men, a fellow with a strong Irish accent that added a surreal air to much of this — How did he end up here? What did he just say? — and a man they kept calling "Applewhite," presumably because this is his name. Irish was short; Applewhite, tall. Irish was the tactician, methodical in his questioning, always setting up for the kill. Applewhite — who is Black, and thus understood what this case was about in a way Irish did not — was given the less savory task of arguing with Maldonado, which happened whenever Applewhite tried to treat this process as a serious one, with two opposing sides trying to beat the other. At one point, Maldonado yelled at Applewhite for being "argumentative" with Thompson.

Representing Davis was — to Davis' detriment, no doubt — a lawyer who should have retired many years ago. The Old Man. His speech was halting, and as a lawyer myself, I saw my future in his face if I don't contribute to my IRA. Thompson's lawyer, in stark contrast, was the other kind of PBA attorney — aggressive, angry and very good at his job. He commanded the courtroom when he spoke, all swagger and confidence, a man in his element, happy to be protecting his client from suffering even the most mild of repercussions for this killing. A true Cop Lawyer.

FOLLOWING THE SCRIPT

I am a lawyer. And so I am used to certain formalities in any legal process, rules of the road, means to ensure — or at least try to — that both sides are on a level playing field and everyone has a rough idea of what will and will not happen during a trial.

None of that is present in an NYPD administrative trial. There is no Civil Practice Law & Rules or Criminal Procedure Law — the statutes that tell judges and lawyers what is and isn't permitted in a legal process — at One Police Plaza. Instead, there are vibes.

So, for example, the officers were allowed to introduce into evidence DA Clark's report declining to charge the officers; and the NYPD's own internal report declining to discipline them. In a real trial, you can't just drop a report down and say, "Here you go judge, enjoy it!" You need someone involved in its creation to come in, sit on the stand and testify about it, where they can then be cross-examined. Here, that would be particularly critical, as the NYPD's investigation of this matter was, as *ProPublica* has conclusively shown, laughably threadbare and clearly designed to exonerate the officers.

Having these reports admitted into evidence – which means Maldonado can read them and consider them and cite them in her ruling – allowed the Old Man and the Cop Lawyer (more the Cop Lawyer) to repeatedly and belligerently insist that everyone else already cleared their clients – it's only the haters and losers at CCRB who want to drag this all out.

During testimony, the lack of rules meant it was never clear why some objections were granted and others denied. Maldonado, particularly in the cross-examination of Thompson, limited CCRB's ability to ask the questions it wished, at one point barring CCRB from asking the traditional Yes or No type questions that are the hallmark of any effective cross, and at another point refusing to allow CCRB to ask Thompson if he remembered his crisis intervention training (which he did not follow) during the incident.

Even the legal standard is unclear. Normally, the burden is on CCRB to show that misconduct was committed by a "preponderance of the evidence" — effectively, more than 50% of the evidence shows guilt. But here, the officers took the position that because CCRB blew the statute of limitations, they could only be charged for acts that would constitute crimes, the so-called "crime exception" to the statute, and this meant that the court would have to find them guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, a far higher and heavier burden for CCRB to meet.

There is no rule book that says this. Indeed, it is directly contrary to Maldonado's previous finding in the Daniel Pantaleo case, which was also subject to an SOL crime exception — there, Maldonado found the CCRB had to meet the lower burden of a preponderance of the evidence. But because we are effectively trying to determine what constitutes "law" by dumping tea leaves on a tabletop, it is unclear what Maldonado will rule this time, and indeed, she asked the attorneys to brief the issue for her.

In general, the evidence presented made this an easy case. Both officers admitted, either tacitly or explicitly, that they failed to follow their training when it came to emotionally disturbed persons, which would have required them to create distance between themselves and Trawick, and call a supervisor. In other words, had they closed the door and called for backup, none of this would have happened. In fact, had they simply left Trawick's home when he demanded they do so — as they didn't have a warrant to be there — nobody would have gotten killed. All of this is so clear and obvious, except that the entire point of these proceedings is to obscure simple truths.

At a certain point during the trial, Applewhite asked that something be noted "for the record." What record? For whose review? There is no appeal here. There is no higher body for the CCRB — or Trawick's family — to ask to review Maldonado's decisions. It's not even clear that there is a record — I tried to use Freedom of Information laws to obtain the trial transcripts and CCRB told me they don't have them, and the NYPD gave me a response date of September.

But we must all, always, adhere to the script. And we must not ever acknowledge that these proceedings are like a raft in a churning sea, guided only by the currents.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

On the last day of trial, we heard from the defendants, Davis (Black, "not gonna tase him," "no no no") and Thompson (white, tase tase, bang bang bang bang). I figured I already knew what both would say. But to be beyond surprise is maybe the saddest thing in the world, and so I was, happily, surprised.

As Irish methodically grilled Thompson on what happened that day, something curious happened. Thompson started admitting mistakes. He started small — admitting that he failed to follow his training on emotionally disturbed persons, which would have dictated that the officers close the door to the apartment to create distance. His admissions got bigger — was it a mistake for Thompson to tase Trawick? Yes, and it was a surprise to Davis that he did so.

And then, the big one. Was it a mistake for Thompson to shoot Trawick? Says Davis: Yes.

A murmur spread through the courtroom. One of the journalists sitting near me asked, "Did he just break the blue wall?" I whispered, "He did indeed."

For the rest of his testimony, Davis seemed like the air went out of him. He had crossed a line, and he knew it. There was no coming back. And I had to give him credit — he tried to stop his partner from killing Trawick, and then fessed up to it even when he had to know it would ruin his career. After a few more questions, Davis's lawyer finished and we took a bathroom break.

After gossiping in the hallway for about 15 minutes, we re-entered the fake courtroom and took our seats. All rise for the NPD

Continued on next page

INSIDE COP COURT

Continued from previous page

employee! Be seated. Now, Thompson's lawyer, Cop Lawyer, had his turn at Davis.

The tenor of Cop Lawyer's questioning was worlds away from The Old Man's. Cop Lawyer immediately began rapid fire spitting Yes or No questions at Davis. Understand that in a real courtroom, many of Cop Lawyer's questions would be disallowed, because Cop Lawyer had a tendency to make statements of fact that were not already in evidence ("So you followed your training, right?" would be an immediate objection/sustained).

After a bit, Cop Lawyer and Davis got into a steady rhythm. Cop Lawyer would make a statement followed by, "Right?" or "Yes or no?" and Davis would quickly respond in the affirmative. I saw the bomb coming before it dropped. Cop Lawyer moved closer and closer to the moment where Thompson shot Trawick before – "And so it was necessary for Officer Thompson to shoot Mr. Trawick, right?" "Yes."

This time the murmur was a wave. My own jaw dropped, and as I looked around me, most jaws in the room were similarly agape. Somehow, in that 15- minute interval, Davis had been convinced to take back his prior admission. Right before our eyes, the Blue Wall had been rebuilt. You could feel the rage in the crowd, even from many of the journalists. How could anyone take this process seriously when this is the result?

Obviously, I don't know what happened during that bathroom break. But I am also not an idiot, and the odds are at least even that somebody got to Davis. In a real court, that would likely be witness tampering, but we already know that laws and rules disappear when we enter this room. In all likelihood, we will never know why Davis flipped on the most critical issue of this entire case.

CCRB got another shot at Davis after Cop Lawyer finished. To my frustration, CCRB didn't ask the obvious question: who did you speak to during the bathroom break? (I suspect such a question may have run afoul of Maldonado's "politeness" rules.) Instead, CCRB, via Applewhite, asked Davis why he changed his testimony. Davis leaned heavily into the farce of this, claiming he had just thought more about his answer. Incredulous, Applewhite asked if this was the first time Davis ever thought about whether his partner was right to shoot Trawick. Davis, who at least had the decency to look ashamed, replied, "Yes."

THE FINAL DAY

After this fiasco, the rest of the day seemed tame. Thompson testified. He stuck to the script, and was snarky and impatient with Applewhite. So was Maldonado, who at one point told Applewhite that his "questions are very confusing." Thompson's most annoying feature was asking to be shown the video whenever CCRB pressed him on specifics, as he was scared to say something that could be proven wrong. Of course, witnesses don't get to make requests, but nobody seemed to care. Indeed, Thompson's lawyer kept claiming CCRB was trying to give Thompson a "memory test," which, yes, this is about what Thompson remembers. It is a memory test.

Thompson's testimony also featured a valiant attempt to pretend that he had no training at all, in anything. Whenever CCRB asked if he followed his training (which he didn't), Thompson became metaphysical, questioning what "training" even means when every situation was different. Slippery as an eel, CCRB couldn't pin him down. Maldonado looked pleased.

Maldonado initially tried to get closing statements done in writing, which would mean the public would never see them, since the NYPD releases no documents from these "trials." CCRB threw a fit and she backed down. The police lawyers spent their time smearing Trawick however they could: He was nuts, but not nuts enough to be an EDP, he was a criminal, he was a threat, oh and by the way Your Esteemed Honor Judge, CCRB blew the statute of limitations so really we shouldn't even be here. Applewhite tried his best, but couldn't overcome the look of disgust Maldonado had whenever he spoke.

Before the curtain fell, Maldonado gave a brief speech about the "unique" legal issues she was facing. None of the issues in this case are unique, and indeed, Maldonado ruled on them already in the Pantaleo case. But in that matter, the Mayor and Police Commissioner had already decided that Pantaleo needed to go, so Maldonado was free to use a legal standard that made it easier to find misconduct. Now, the powers that be have already exonerated Thompson and Davis, so Maldonado needs to memory-hole her prior ruling.

At the end of the day, a Black cop with 16 years on the force tried to stop his trigger-happy white rookie partner from killing a Black man. He failed. Davis tried to repent for his sins – he tried to tell the truth. But he is a weak man, and again, he failed. Thompson is a murderer, and Davis is a coward. Both of them will have long careers with the New York Police Department.

COOKING WHILE BLACK: *Kawaski Trawick was shot and killed in his kitchen after NYPD officers Brendan Thompson and Herbert Davis knocked down his door and entered his apartment without a warrant.*

COURTESY NYPL

THEN & NOW *The post-Civil War incarnation of the NYPD.*

NEW REPORT DETAILS NYPD'S SORDID PAST

FROM 1845 TO 2023

By Theodore Hamm

The ongoing violent crackdown on Jordan Neely protests by the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG) comes as no surprise. Despite its blatant, costly misconduct during the 2020 George Floyd protests, the "elite unit" has evaded scrutiny, with NYPD officials skipping a City Council oversight hearing in March.

Meanwhile, NYPD Commissioner Keechant Sewell has made a mockery of the Civilian Complaint Review Board disciplinary process for NYPD officers found guilty of misconduct.

While earnest liberals may seek to improve the "professionalism" of cops via measures including better salaries and improved training, a new report shows that if history is any guide, such initiatives will do little to alter the direction of the NYPD. It remains an entity that defies accountability.

Released last week by the Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP), "The Notorious and True History of NYC's Finest" reviews the history of the NYPD from its origins in the mid-19th century through the present. The report culls from the work from a wide array of scholars, including Marilynn S. Johnson, Clarence Taylor and Jules Stewart.

"Notorious" examines the role of the NYPD in regulating and enforcing the social order since the Civil War era. Initially, that meant cracking down on the city's burgeoning ranks of the city's Irish immigrant poor. Yet by the end of the Civil War, the NYPD had already become a stronghold of Irish career advancement.

During the Gilded Age heyday of Tammany Hall, corruption flourished in the city, and the NYPD was no stranger to it. In the mid-1890s, a report commissioned by Republican state senators documented "police involvement in extortion, bribery, counterfeiting, voter intimidation, election fraud, brutality and scams." In response, Theodore Roosevelt, a member of what was then the board of police commissioners, helped raise the qualifications required to join the force.

One of the many valuable contributions of "Notorious" is that it sheds light on less-known events sparked by police-initiated hostilities, including the Tenderloin Riot of 1900 and the San Juan Hill Riot of 1905. Now Herald Square, the Tenderloin was a Black neighborhood at the time. A Black man named Arthur Harris stabbed a white undercover cop to death after the cop accused Harris' girlfriend of prostitution; the incident caused a three-day wave of violent reprisals by the NYPD.

As Harlem's Black population grew rapidly over the next few decades, so did tensions between cops and local residents, sparking riots in 1935, 1943 and 1964. Reports of police brutality and lawsuit settlements with the city regularly appeared in the *Amsterdam News*. The NYPD's Red Squad infiltrated Malcolm X's inner circle and the local chapter of the Black Panthers.

Police repression of the city's LGBTQ+ community sparked the Stonewall uprising of 1969. Five days of protests brought thousands of people onto the streets of Greenwich Village, leading to the initial Gay Pride parade one year later. The corrupt, violent culture of the NYPD soon came under the microscope.

In response to the revelations of widespread police misconduct by Officer Frank Serpico, Mayor John Lindsay appointed the Knapp Commission in April 1970. High-profile hearings featured an array of whistleblower cops and city residents, who outlined a range of shakedown schemes that targeted bodegas, drug-dealers and pimps. Reform-oriented NYPD Commissioner Patrick Murphy vowed to "clean up" the department, implementing integrity checks and cracking down on bribery.

"Notorious" then jumps ahead to the City Hall Police Riot of 1992, when cops — egged on by Rudy Giuliani, who had lost to David Dinkins in the 1989 mayoral race — stomped on cars and stormed City Hall. They were upset that Dinkins had followed through on his campaign pledge to create a civilian-controlled CCRB (previously it was housed within the NYPD). Giuliani's allegiance to the NYPD remained steadfast throughout his two terms as mayor.

While in office, Dinkins responded to a major NYPD corruption scandal by creating the Mollen Commission. Officers in five precincts (two each in Manhattan and Brooklyn, along with one in the Bronx) had been brutalizing local residents. Bernie Cawley, a Bronx patrolman, told the commission that he deployed lead-loaded gloves, a flashlight and/or a nightstick over 400 times.

Bill Bratton, Giuliani's first police commissioner, vowed to implement reforms recommended by the Mollen Commission, but little changed. "Proactive policing" methods such as Bratton's broken windows and Ray Kelly's stop-and-frisk furthered the hostile relationship between cops and young men of color.

After a sustained legal campaign driven by the Center for Constitutional Rights, in 2012 Federal Judge Shira Scheindlin ruled the department's widespread stop and frisk practice to be unconstitutional. Mayor Michael Bloomberg and NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly fought back hard, arguing that the proactive approach reduced crime in minority neighborhoods. Bill de Blasio made ending "the stop-and-frisk era" a central plank in his successful 2013 run for mayor.

De Blasio, however, antagonized criminal-justice activists by naming Bratton as his first police commissioner, thus reviving the controversies surrounding broken windows. The final chapters of "Notorious" review the major events of the last decade, from the Eric Garner saga through the George Floyd protests. PROP's own court monitoring steadily finds that nearly 90% of the NYPD's current arrests involve people of color.

The immediate aim of "Notorious" is "to debunk the sanctified place that the NYPD occupies in NYC's political landscape, despite its long track record of racist and abusive practices," says Bob Gangi, founder of PROP. "Our ultimate goal is admittedly very ambitious: for this document to become an active part of a civil rights movement that transforms New York into a city that provides a just, safe and inclusive living experience for all people."

Given that a former cop who answers to the *NY Post* currently runs City Hall, the NYPD's sanctified place seems secure for now. As "Notorious" shows, any meaningful changes in police practices will arise only from external pressure, not from within the department itself.

COURTESY

SUPER WONK

JENNIFER BRINEY HAS TURNED HER OBSESSION WITH RESEARCHING CONGRESS INTO A COMPELLING PODCAST ABOUT HOW GOVERNMENT REALLY WORKS

By John Tarleton

We've all seen the place where our nation's representatives gather — the giant rotunda with the gleaming white dome atop it. But what really goes on inside Congress where trillions of dollars are allocated and lawmakers wrestle over legislation that affects almost every facet of our lives?

Jennifer Briney is obsessed with that question. For the past decade, the host of the Congressional Dish podcast has been reading voluminous tracts of legislation line-by-line, delving into committee reports and watching countless congressional hearings where experts testify and are then promptly ignored. All this legwork informs a twice-a-month podcast where Briney takes a deep dive into a single topic — cryptocurrency, the Inflation Reduction Act, the U.S.'s long-running involvement in Ukraine — drawing exclusively on official congressional sources.

"My biggest problem is I have more content than I know what to do with," she says with a laugh.

In a world flooded with clickbait, the average Congressional Dish podcast is an hour-and-a-half long and meticulously sourced — perfect for a long commute. In other hands, the material could be sleep-inducing. But Briney's passion for her subject matter pulls listeners along as she gradually weaves together disparate story threads into a larger narrative. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

THE INDYPENDENT: How did you become drawn to one covering Congress in such a unique way when most journalists on Capitol Hill are content to pass on what senior congressional leaders say and leave it at that.

JENNIFER BRINEY: I became really interested in what my country was doing in the world in 2003 after it started the war in Iraq. I was studying abroad in Germany for six months. People were curious about what Americans thought and asked me questions in bars and restaurants and, to my embarrassment, I didn't know the answers. I was of voting age and I should know this. Why didn't I have the information?

When I came back, I started researching and was horrified. I blamed everything on George W. Bush. My father pointed out Bush couldn't do anything without Congress' approval and suggested I look there. When I started the podcast, I naively thought I could read every bill and let my listeners know what was up before Congress voted on it. That's impossible because of the length of the bills and how little time there is to read them. It was a much harder project than I ever expected it to be. But that's where I learned how many subjects are being legislated in these bills. By watching congressional hearings, I learned so much about our role in the world and what's actually happening.

There is fascinating information that is given to Congress by experts who testify in these hearings. And it is shamefully ignored. I want to know all the backstory about an issue, to understand why they're legislating the way they are. My biggest problem is I have more content than I know what to do with. It's easier to cover the he-said-she-said among congressional leaders. And I understand the desire to go into political reporting and cover campaigns. But governance reporting is what I'm endlessly fascinated by.

In a recent podcast, you looked at the train wreck in East Palestine that poisoned the air and water of an impoverished southern corner of southern Ohio. For a week or two in March, it was the big national story. It gave corporate media the disaster porn and the partisan finger pointing it craves. And then it fell out of sight. By doing your deep-dive into the congressional record, what did you learn that hasn't been mentioned elsewhere?

I think the big-picture story for me was the extent to which these

companies are being allowed to govern themselves. From every angle that I looked at — from who decides where sensors are put, to who decides that a wheel bearing is too hot, to who decides where the threshold is when the train has to stop, to who decides which contractors are going to clean up the messes, to who decides what how the victims are going to be compensated. All of those decisions are being left up to Norfolk Southern, to the point that North Southern was the one that decided to burn five train cars full of vinyl chloride that went up in a mushroom cloud over this town. The EPA kind of sat back and said, "Okay, we'll do some modeling for you."

That's crazy.

One of the things that has shocked me in the decade that I've been doing this show is a line of thinking inside of Congress that the private sector can always do everything better. We are seeing the consequences of this idea that the private sector can be trusted and the government cannot.

And this belief is shared by both parties?

It's gospel to the Republicans. With the Democrats, it's hard to tell if they go along with that position because they are so committed to bipartisanship, or if it's what they really believe. They're not as dogmatic as the Republicans, but they do tend to trust the private sector to do a lot of things the government used to do.

A lot of your work zeroes in on the corporate capture of Congress. How pervasive would you say that problem is, and what have years of research taught you about it that the general public might not realize?

It's not just the large campaign contributions. One thing I don't think the public fully appreciates is the influence of corporate lobbyists. A lot of times, these are former members of Congress who have passed through the revolving door to the private sector where they get paid 10 times as much as they did when they were in Congress to go to work for the industries they used to regulate. And then they go back to Congress to talk with their friends and former co-workers. Just by human nature, you're going to listen to your friends. You're going to listen to the people that you served on a committee with. I believe that the government isn't all bad or all good. It's a tool. Unfortunately, the corporations have figured out how to use it in a way the public has not.

Congress also funds and carries out oversight of U.S. foreign policy. You've devoted many segments to exploring the various ways the U.S. government acts as a facilitator for corporations to enter other countries' markets and do as they please. Can you talk more about the "world trade system" that this country has shaped and led since the end of World War II and how it works?

My eyes were really opened to this globalized economic system when I studied a bill to repeal country-of-origin labels for beef and chicken. The goal of the bill was to stop telling Americans where their food was coming from. I looked at this and thought, "Who wouldn't want to know where their food comes from?"

That's when I learned about the investor-state dispute system established under the World Trade Organization that requires each participating country to treat companies from other countries the same as your own, thus requiring more paperwork for these foreign companies to keep track of where their meat came from that was ruled to be unfair. From there, I dove into how the U.S. played a key role in establishing the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund at the end of World War II and then in the 1990s, the World Trade Organization. All with the goal of creating a global economic system that we the people have no say in, nor do people in other countries. We need to name these institutions, understand them, do what we can to change the structure.

A lot of my investigations started with, "Why would we do this?" And if the goal is to go in there to extract resources, who benefits? The shareholders of those companies. Because there are so many of us that have no stake in the stock market whatsoever — we're just footing the bill for a few to get rich off the many.

It seems we're at a moment when the established order is starting to crack up.

READY TO DISH: *Jennifer Briney, host of the Congressional Dish podcast.*

What I'm seeing in the world is that Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — the BRICS countries — are creating a whole separate system. We've been pretty bad stewards of the current system, which I think the world learned in 2008. The U.S. has used its leadership in the world trade system in such an aggressive way that there are other powerful countries that are determined to forge an alternative.

Not that the U.S. is going to give up easily. You had a brilliant episode in February about how the U.S. has been pulling out all the stops behind the scenes to keep the small South American nation of Ecuador in its orbit. This includes beefing up support for Ecuador's armed forces. And then a couple of months later, that country's pro-U.S. president dissolved parliament, announcing he would rule by decree, and the military gave him its blessing.

It's wild — like you see a country listed in the annual Defense Authorization bill. And within a year or two, crazy things happen. Despite these kinds of efforts, it remains to be seen if the U.S. can recover the position in the world it is accustomed to. Since the Ukraine War began, the BRICS system has sped up so fast. France, for example, is doing deals with Brazil in reals. I've gone from documenting how the U.S. is sucking all these countries into its world trade system to now watching the U.S. try to hold on by its fingernails to what it already has. It's incredible to watch this happen in real time but also scary because the U.S. may become desperate enough to resort to war to reassert its position as the world's dominant power.

"A LOT OF MY INVESTIGATIONS STARTED WITH 'WHY WOULD WE DO THIS?' AND IF THE GOAL IS TO EXTRACT RESOURCES, WHO BENEFITS?"

Where do you see change coming from?

I think change is coming from outside the U.S. As for my generation, I don't think it needs to rule the world, and isn't all that excited about spending this enormous amount of money protecting the shipping lanes of transnational corporations. Why do I have to sacrifice getting health care from my taxes to make sure that Pepsi can safely get through the Strait of Taiwan?

Meanwhile, you're doing this work without any corporate sponsorships.

I feel like independent journalism is getting us more and more accustomed as consumers to supporting the different outlets we turn to for news and analysis. You can have your establishment news brought to you by Boeing and Pfizer and General Motors or you can help support something better than that. For myself, I support at least 20 different news entities. I know people care about the kind of news they are getting because I'm still doing this work 10 years later in a crowdfunded way.

For more, see congressionaldish.com. Twitter: @JenBriney.

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THIS IS NOT A WATERMELON

By Lara-Nour Walton

Her hijab was peach-colored but Nerdeen Kiswani spoke of watermelon. In the black of its seeds, the green and white of its rinds, and the crimson of its flesh, Palestinians do not merely see a fruit, Kiswani told an intrigued audience. They see their flag.

She explained this before a wall plastered with political posters in a small art space drenched in the warm glow of sunset. Around two dozen Palestinian-American organizers and their supporters gathered in The Empty Circle in Park Slope to hear Kiswani present an oral history of Palestinian organizing in Brooklyn at Kyle Goen's exhibition, *Let Art Be Training in the Practice of Freedom*.

The exhibition featured an array of material referencing the political work of Within Our Lifetime and Decolonize This Place. Custom shirts hung on a clothing rack — tags emblazoned with the words of poet Fred Moten. Zines entitled "General Strike" and "Palestine, BLM & Boycott in the Arts" were on display. Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech spun on a record player in the middle of the room, chosen from a curated selection of vinyls. Outside the gallery lying on the sidewalk, a large protest banner declared "Globalize the Intifada" to passersby.

The May 26 event was coordinated by Within Our Lifetime. WOL is a Bay Ridge-based grassroots organization fighting for Palestinian liberation. It was founded in 2015 by a group of young Palestinians living in New York, including Kiswani, who is the group's chair.

Kiswani used Goen's selection of WOL posters to guide her through a narration of Palestinian organizing in Brooklyn and beyond. She motioned to one such flier boasting iconography reminiscent of watermelons. "Even in Palestine, the Palestinian flag was made illegal," she informed attendees. In 1967, Israel prohibited the display of the Palestinian flag or its colors — red, black, and green — within occupied Palestine. "Palestinians would incorporate the colors of the flags into the[ir] artwork, which was then also made illegal… So some started drawing watermelons." The succulent summer fruit has since become a transgressive symbol adopted by #FreePalestine protesters globally — including WOL activists here in New York, who passed out watermelon slices at a Nakba 75 commemoration protest earlier this month.

For Kiswani and the surrounding flock of young Palestinian organizers, the subversive depiction of the flag's colors represents a larger artistic movement — one of everyday resistance. "We didn't choose to be here. We didn't choose to be exiled from our homeland. But, that shouldn't mean that our history, our practices are gonna be erased," she said. "Making sure we remember every possible way — through education, through music, through dance, through art — is a part of resistance."

Kiswani's words mesh with Goen's artistic philosophy. Goen sees his political art as a precursor of direct action. He says that art should be a site for justice: "My work does not stand in for struggle, (it) is in service of struggle."

WOL members recognize the galvanizing properties of Goen's art. Nabila, an organizer with the group, remarked that "because of (Goen) and all the artwork that he does, we are able to bring people to our events, have speakers and media come. As a result, WOL becomes a collective movement with a creative approach to keeping our history and memory alive."

AMBA GUERGUERIAN

WOL's historical and artistic event commemorated the long tradition of local Palestine activism — Brooklyn's Bay Ridge neighborhood is home to one of the largest Arab-American communities nationwide. One of the first pro-Palestine protests in the United States took place in Brooklyn, Kiswani explained. (The Nov. 9, 1918 demonstration, which, according to *The New York Times*, saw a turnout of around 500 people, decried mass Palestinian displacement at the hands of a Zionist incursion; it took place one year after the British government issued the Balfour declaration, a public statement promising a Jewish state in Palestine).

Kiswani then fast-forwarded to modern-day organizing. After 9/11, she says, the United States saw a decline in pro-Palestine action, especially among Arab-Americans who felt silenced by the attacks and less secure organizing for Palestine. "We started WOL to revitalize that revolutionary spirit that every Palestinian and Palestine supporter has but did not feel comfortable expressing due to (post-9/11) targeted surveillance and vilification… We wanted to bring Palestine organizing back to Brooklyn." She stressed that Palestinian-Americans, who do not live under the bombs and bullets of occupation, should never lose sight of the struggle back home.

SOMEDAY: *Nerdeen Kiswani, chair of Within Our Lifetime, a Palestinian-led grassroots organization in Brooklyn.*

Since its founding eight years ago, WOL has hosted many large protests in Manhattan at the Israeli Consulate and U.N. headquarters but centers much of its effort in Bay Ridge. "It's important to have actions in the neighborhood where so many of us live," said Kiswani, pointing to the necessity of pro-Palestine action coming from within Palestinian communities themselves.

In addition to rolling out demonstrations in real time against ongoing Israeli aggression (air raids, deaths of prisoners, ongoing siege of Palestinian neighborhoods, etc.), WOL coordinates a yearly protest commemorating the Nakba, or catastrophe, which refers to events in 1948 when Zionist military forces expelled more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and seized 78% of historic Palestine.

As a people is forced away from their native land, it is not unusual for the displaced to assimilate to the country to which they flee — in effect, abandoning parts of their own culture. Cognizant of this phenomenon, WOL both mobilizes people on the ground in New York City against the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and hosts community events, like traditional Palestinian Dabke dance lessons.

At the May 26 oral history, Kiswani also spoke about the solidarity relationships WOL maintains with other local activist groups. She highlighted the importance of persistent Black support for local and national Palestinian liberation movements. Malcolm X, active in New York from 1943 until his assassination in 1965, was an instrumental champion of the cause.

His advocacy still resonates with Generation Vote organizer and event attendee Hamilton Brooks, who commented that "growing up Black American with parents who were interested in civil-rights work … I always heard, 'You don't have Black liberation without Palestinian liberation,' and vice versa."

During an interview with *The Indypendent*, Goen wondered, "How do we train for freedom so that when we get freedom, it's not taken?"

Kiswani has an answer: popular organizing.

"In the process of showing our community how much people support Palestine, we cause an irreversible empowerment that nobody can take away from us," she said. Goen also has his own response: art. But this event proved that those answers can be one and the same.

Amba Guerguerian contributed to this report.

A WHOLE WORLD TO GRAIN

Oceans of Grain: How American Wheat Remade the World
By Scott Reynolds Nelson
Basic Books, 2022

By Bennett Baumer

GARY MARTIN

Oceans of Grain by Scott Reynolds Nelson is a unique work of economic history. While sweeping in its scope, the book is concise in a genre of doorstoppers, with a simple premise: Grain production and trade have shaped the modern world. In the 19th century, the Russian Empire relied on chumaki wagons to bring wheat from what is now Ukraine, feeding the armies that conquered the steppes and giving rise of the port of Odessa. Half a world away, the United States expanded westward, dispossessing Native American tribes and transporting Russian grain strains to the Great Plains. And in the 14th century, Nelson writes, the plague bacteria, Yersinia pestis, traveled in the bellies of the fleas that bit rodents in grain shipments and spread the Black Death to Europe and northern Africa.

Nelson's central character is Israel Lazarevich Gelfand, better known by his revolutionary name Parvus. His family escaped pogroms in what is now Belarus when he was a child and settled in Odessa, where they traded grain. From this upbringing, Parvus became both knowledgeable about international trade and relations and a revolutionary committed to bringing down the Russian empire.

The Russian grain shipped from Odessa to Europe in the mid-19th century led to the explosive growth of what Parvus called "consumption-accumulation" cities. "Labor and capital accumulated where food was cheapest. Cheap food arriving by water meant that cities with the deepest docks thrived," Nelson writes. "Reformers and capitalists huddled poor people fresh from the countryside into workhouses where they assembled goods from foreign and domestic sources: matchsticks, pencils, hard candy, lead toys, wooden boxes, and combs." The cheap grain fed cities' growth — Paris, London, Liverpool, Antwerp and Amsterdam doubled in population from 1845 to 1860 — and spurred investments in buildings, machinery, factories and infrastructure such as sewers and rail transportation.

In the United States, Alfred Nobel's dynamite was put to use to widen and deepen waterways and clear the way for the railroads that would transport Midwestern grain to New York Harbor for shipping to hungry European capitals.

Not surprisingly, *Oceans of Grain* argues that grain played a key role in the Civil War. The merchant North invested heavily in railroads to transport crops from agricultural areas like the South — but to fully realize a profit, they needed to transport consumer goods as well. When railroads set up stations in non-slave states, shops and markets grew in the downtowns surrounding them. In Southern towns and expanding slave areas in Missouri, that didn't happen so much.

"[S]lavery helped produce a society with an insubstantial middle class of resellers and consumers of Eastern goods," Nelson writes. "Impoverished enslaved people couldn't buy cloth, razors, plate glass or hard candies. Without a sturdy middle class of consumers, no one would erect stores to sell Eastern goods in interior regions."

While Northern merchants and financiers joined forces with abolitionists to bring down the plantation South, Nelson says, they despised slavery not on moral but on economic grounds.

Nelson can be forgiven for his grain enthusiasm, but his portrayal of slavery-hating Northern merchants and financiers needs revision. The slave trade made many of them wealthy. The banks that would later merge into J.P. Morgan's financial empire accepted slaves as collateral for loans to plantations (as Russian banks did with serfs before serfdom was abolished in 1861) and would repossess African-Americans if the slavers defaulted. New York Life and other insurers sold policies to Southern planters to protect them against the risk of slaves escaping to freedom or master's violent temper going too far. During the Civil War, New York's Democratic mayor floated the idea of the city seceding from the Union to protect its lucrative cotton trade.

By the 1870s, the United States had displaced Russia as Europe's main grain provider, with steamships bringing it across the Atlantic and Europe adopting financial systems including the gold standard and commodities futures markets. A drought in 1890–91 suppressed Russian grain yields and raised food prices so high that peasants and workers starved.

In the wake of that starvation and another Russian-Turkish war, Parvus agitated against the Russian empire and forged friendships with what would become the Bolshevik leadership. He published left-wing newspapers, acted as an agent to the Young Turks revolting against the Ottoman empire and the German state, helping to arrange the sealed train that carried Vladimir Lenin and supporters to St. Petersburg in 1917. Parvus also became a wealthy grain trader (as well as a gun runner, *Oceans of Grain* hints). By the October Revolution, while still identifying politically as a Bolshevik, he was a multimillionaire. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and others disowned him.

The book ends with the bloodbaths of World War I and the Russian Civil War. Parvus died in Berlin in 1924. Two of his sons would become Soviet diplomats; one was purged by Joseph Stalin, but he miraculously survived the gulag to write about it. In the Ukrainian wheat lands, Stalin's agricultural policies, intended to destroy landowning peasant kulaks' economic power and establish collective farms, proved disastrous. As grain harvests plummeted, the Stalin regime demanded that grain stores be shipped to the cities, resulting in the mass starvation and death Ukrainians now call the Holodomor.

NO MORE PANIC ATTACKS FOR THE MAN

By Bina Christan

Mind racing, chest heaving, I start slipping into black. Breathing becomes irregular. I succumb to the darkness, wailing into a pillow, grasping, digging fingernails in my arm. Punching my thighs, harder. Slight relief. Then the heaving gets out of control again. I search around frantically for a way out but it's too dark. After a while, I grope around, find the scissors. Then the storm begins to calm, loud sounds reduced to a whimper.

I clean up, take a shower, exhausted. It's 2 p.m. I have to finish that thing for work I had been in the middle of before leaving for my second job. But I start scrolling instead. "No. Stop. What are you doing? You don't have time for this!" I don't even like what's on the screen, but I've checked my phone at least three times in 10 minutes. There's a term for it — digital amnesia, I think, and resign to smoking a spliff.

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I GO OVER TO JUNE'S after work. "I had another panic attack last night," she tells me. "I finally found a therapist that will take me, but it's $200 a session."

June and I were both seeing therapists through a harm-reduction center in Manhattan until COVID disrupted the program. On Medicaid our options are quite limited. I was able to reconnect with a therapist I'd used in the past who accepts $70 cash per session, which is still a stretch, but June hasn't been that lucky. Everywhere she calls that takes Medicaid is fully booked with a long waiting list.

Next to promotions for Seamless, online-only banks or online-only doctors, I see subway ads for subscription therapy apps. It feels like they're taking everything away as we know it, and rebranding it to us in this hyper-time-efficient robot world.

"I want to have kids," I tell June, on the defense. "It's only human!"

• • •

I WAIT ALMOST TWO HOURS in the small room for Dr. Mansour. From the hall, I hear him talking to an old woman, to parents and their kids. Each of us gets 15 minutes. "So, how's the Zoloft going?" he asks.

Later I'm on the phone with my aunt. "Gina has been getting panic attacks, too," she says about my 14-year-old cousin. "Call your sister; I think she's in a funk again," says my dad. "I think I'm depressed," says my other sister. "I've been taking Valium to sleep since Mimi died," says my stepmom. "The doctor wants to put me on Welbutrin," says my boyfriend. "It's tested," says my drug dealer. "We got the results of my brother's autopsy. He just took one Xanax, but it seems like it was laced with Fentanyl," says my friend, so we go to another Fentanyl funeral.

• • •

TALKING TO A YOUNG UNIONIST, I mention an eviction defense that's ongoing. "Aw man, getting evicted sucks. I've been through that shit," he says. "You smoke?"

Most of my organizer friends seem to be as reliant as I am on crutches to slow the frequency of burnouts and meltdowns. One smokes blunts constantly. Another, in addition to weed, takes a microdose of mushrooms every morning to calm the nerves. The reality is that people who are down to fight the system have often been fucked over by it. Getting caught in those snarls often results in long-term negative side effects. Plus, whatever personal issues and family history and the grind of working a full-time job while doing activism that requires us to be constantly aware of the ills of the world.

For some, being politically active feels like an obvious necessity in response to the current state of affairs. For others, it's a grounding way to connect to the world, a way of staying still. When we build community groups, we grow roots — entrenched people power that serves as the groundwork for further organizing — an act that in itself is a rebellion against the speed of "progress."

• • •

ANXIETY HITS LIKE D-DAY. It's gotta be the least natural feeling to experience, a shock to the system.

The prevalence of anxiety and depression has steadily risen over the past century or so, particularly in the last decade — with rapid increases during COVID (25% of youth globally experiences depression; anxiety, 21%, found JAMA Pediatrics in 2021). Such suffering feels like a collective consciousness that we're in overdrive, that the current world order is unsustainable.

Every day I feel how unnatural life is: eating Costco shrimp from China, locking the elderly in nursing homes, NYPD filming everybody that files out of a Drake concert.

"You used to call me on my cell phone/Late night when you need my love." I go to make a call but instantly forget and end up scrolling. Inflation, shootings, no more Arctic sea ice, new series out, astrology app ads (things a guy does when he's not interested in you based on his zodiac sign), killer cops, Tortuguita, rainy winters, Brazil, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Yemen, Nicaragua, Peru, Cuba, Syria, shuttered libraries, Amazon Prime, the Amazon rainforest, seed rights, Khartoum, raves, Ketamine, BBLs, third part-time jobs, rent increases, fossil fuels, #StopCopCity, remember the summer pop smoke died?, Republicans, Democrats, a video of a tiny gerbil licking a plastic spoon, #FreePalestine, Black Panther II, endless AI news (eating disorder hotline workers replaced by robots after starting to unionize). This is how we consume information in the modern era. A punch to the head.

"Time used to move more slowly," my mom wrote in a letter. It's true. As everything else seems to be moving faster, time becomes more finite, commodified. Less spontaneous. Speed-dating used to be a thing; now we swipe through 100 profiles in under five minutes.

• • •

I THINK ABOUT HOW the modern capitalist world, often via technology, has been successful in dividing and conquering: fracturing movements for change, depoliticizing us and making everyone mentally ill as fuck.

When there's constantly something new to protest, it's hard to stay sane, let alone committed to the furthering of any goal, group, risk. For the fruits of any struggle to be harvested, slowing down and digging in is very necessary, and also — maybe not so coincidentally — an approach I've been using to calm my anxiety. When it's on the rise, I take a moment to pause and look at a tree or a plant. By admiring nature's geometrical patterns, I force myself into the present.

The panic attacks still come, but less frequently. I'm learning what works to manage the constant anxiety pulsating in my chest. It feels good to walk through the marshlands in South Brooklyn, to put the damn phone down, read books, listen to a whole album, to indulge in debates deep into the night over how to rebel against time.

• • •

I WALK BY the abandoned MTA building where the neighborhood stray cats live. There's a man with a small baby in a stroller stopped in front of it. "They're his favorite," says the man.

"You're not alone," I say to the baby; wildfire smoke, the smell of roses, shade's rustling shadows all floating around us.

Enjoying the leaf-stained-green morning light on my skin, I think, "A baby — the most pure, precious thing — brought into this damned world. How will it fare?" And then my mind wanders to the children I'll have someday and how we'll be in this fight together.

CHRISTINE LARSEN

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Reverend Billy,
I left the city during the pandemic and worked remotely. If we get more wildfire smoke, I think I will bail again. I know it sounds selfish, but I just want to be someplace normal where I can see the sky and not choke on the air.

— JANNA

Dear Janna,
The smoke of Wednesday June 7, and I'm sure in the future too, is the way that the Earth speaks to its great predator these days. Each natural disaster is a natural communication. My translation is: "Get back to living in the present tense. You have lost clear seeing, honesty, vision ... You live in the future and you live in the past but Be Here Now and you will stop poisoning all of us."

The corporations and their politicians are always pulling us out of the present into the future. "Buy this perfume, this car, this diploma ... and you WILL be happy, wealthy, goodlooking ..." The military and their politicians are always pulling us into the past. "Let's shoot, spy and bomb ... and America Will Be Great Again."

Can we resist these gargantuan pressures (the marketing and military/police budgets of the US are about the same, each over a trillion annually)? To respond to the message in the Earth's wind and waves we need to Be Here Now! We gotta show up!

• • •

Hey Billy,
I've been hearing a lot recently about how Artificial Intelligence is poised to take over everything and may someday drive us flesh-and-blood humans into extinction. What are your thoughts on AI? Do you think you could be replaced by a Chatbot?

— LUKE

Dear Luke,
There is something hilarious and true here, watching corporations get chased around by their own products. The personhood of the corporations passed into the products as a transmission of rights.

AI is the latest in that deadly parade of corporate attempts to intermediate how we think and feel. The human stories, compassionate care, cultural inventions that take place in loving, in friendships, in various kinds of public organized chaos we call "the commons" — that is seen by corporate geniuses as so many profit centers.

The computer age with all its scaling up of information distribution, endless social media connections and lately attempts at virtual reality like the zombifying Reality Pro from Apple — all of this is more contempt for human-to-human contact of an actual neighborhood commons. Such meeting places, where stories and songs, silence and flirtations are constantly in the mix, in the cradle of the complexity of an ecosystem, in my Brooklyn neighborhood it is the old forest-and-meadow park — that anti-business mystery is not just under attack from the simulations of profit-taking corporations, with advertising looming over the edges of the parks, but such source places are also under siege by militarized police, who cannot seem to trust us to be together. Prospect Park in Brooklyn is vastly over-policed, with NYPD fresh from tours in Afghanistan confronting birdwatchers, accusing them of public urination or walking too slowly in a roadway.

Products and cops, cops and products — these are the bullies of the free. But they have every right to be suspicious. Where does change come from? Not from artificial intelligence. ACT UP and Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter in Ferguson and Minnesota and the world — change takes place between real humans who find a way to meet in person. Those meetings have limitless possibilities in them, with confusion and joy and failure and tune-humming and drumming and demands of justice in those moments we are together. And they might do anything! And we have the mutual best wish to survive the ultimate expression of this benighted electronic age, the completely fake human with the programmed mind and the absence of real love.

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.

MEDICAID

Continued from page 6

public-health emergency around COVID-19 was over.

GRASSROOTS OUTREACH

While being on the lookout for communication from the State of Health doesn't sound too difficult, the reality is that mail gets lost or forgotten, mass texts are often ignored and we're more hesitant than ever to give our private information over the phone. It's necessary to meet people where they're at.

When the news broke late last year that Medicaid unwinding would begin April 1, the state encouraged the Community Service Society (CSS) of New York to start working on a campaign called Keep New York Covered. CSS secured program funding from eight foundations and has partnered with 36 smaller organizations around the state.

"We have awarded over $1.3 million to these small, grassroots, community-based groups that are all certified by the State to provide enrollment services so that they can get the word out to their clients and beyond," Elisabeth Benjamin, VP of Health Initiatives at CSS, told *The Indypendent*.

"You need boots on the ground, people that [enrollees] can trust to come to if they get a notice in the mail. It's not gonna get done by a state agency calling someone, especially with so much distrust between communities and government," says Maria Lizardo, executive director of Northern Manhattan Improvement Association, a community organization that has received grant money from CSS for unwinding outreach and to assist people with the recertification process.

"Anywhere we can be at where we can meet community members, that's where we're at," Lizardo told *The Indy* in early June at a neighborhood carnival on St. Nicholas Ave. in Washington Heights. A variety of health and public-services tables were located next to the event's bandstand, urging people to interact with them. All of NMIC's handouts were gone hours before the event ended.

Most of NMIC's clients speak Spanish and prefer to communicate face-to-face. "Univision and Telemundo — along with word of mouth — are some of the most common ways of communicating this; I've seen a lot of clients come in because of they watch those channels all the time," says Alba Fresco, Coordinating Health Care Navigator at NMIC, about people who come to the organization for assistance with Medicaid recertifications.

If you don't want to have to deal with recertifying alone, reach out to an organization in your neighborhood that is equipped to help people with government-sponsored health insurance, or call CSS at (888) 614-5400 for help finding one.

AN EASIER WAY

While the effort that the State and its partners are undertaking is a mighty one, there would be no "unwinding" if we had a universal system of free or low cost public health care in which we wouldn't be price gouged for essential medications or hunted down by collection agencies for medical bills.

"If we took all the resources we spent on health-care coverage through our patchwork system and just had, for example, Medicare for all," Elisabeth Benjamin told *The Indy,* "then people would be enrolled in coverage as a resident of the United States and providers would get paid, and the whole system would be probably be a lot more user-friendly for patients. For patients, our system does not work very well."

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